



Discovering Diversity

Like a patchwork quilt stitching unique pieces of material, plants and animals along this half-mile loop are interwoven to create an environment that combines a variety of habitats into an integrated community. Salt marshes, wetlands, maritime forests and rolling dunes along with the plants and animals associated with these ecosystems interact with one another. They are acted upon by the wind, sun, and salt spray and occasional over wash. These physical components sculpt and shape this living mosaic.

Wooded Wetlands

Pine trees and holly bushes are not the typical image conjured up by the term wetlands. However, these wooded areas serve a vital role in controlling freshwater runoff due to rainfall. The soils soak up moisture preventing water from entering Big Lagoon. This maintains salinity levels in Big Lagoon enabling a wide variety

of marine life to exist. Storm runoff often carries substances found on paved surfaces, such as motor oil and gasoline, into the closest body of water. The spongy soil in this area functions as a filter absorbing and breaking down these potentially toxic pollutants before they can affect the surrounding area.

Stinky Swamps

Opinions vary as to the value of marshes. To many they are mosquito-infested areas to be filled in and built on. Our language is full of phrases that describe marshes in less than favorable terms, *bogged down, caught in a quagmire, or just plain swamped*. Further investigation reveals that wetlands are some of the most

productive places on earth. More than 80% of all breeding birds and 95% of all commercially harvested seafood depend on wetlands. Beyond the overlook, decayed plant material generated by marsh grasses, spartina and black needle rush, form the base of this wetland food web.

ridges that run parallel to the mainland, barrier islands are unique in nature. The wide sandy gulf beaches give way to rolling hills of sand anchored in place by vegetation. Sea oats crown these dunes and hold them together with root systems that can extend up to ten meters down into the sand. Just as wind and waves shape the dunes, the plants that are able to survive close

harsh environment. Gnarled and twisted by the cloud of salt spray launched by waves crashing on the shore, the salt pruned vegetation resembles the work of a Japanese bonsai artist. The dune habitat is home to the Perdido Key Beach mouse whose adaptive coloration enables it to blend with the surroundings in an effort to avoid detection by predators.

Island Discoveries

Although perdido means lost in Spanish, your exploration may have led you to discover the key and it's amazing biological diversity in one of the last vestiges of old Florida in this

area. The dunes, forests, marshes, wetland and associated wildlife along this trail are a living legacy of a barrier island.

